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ABSTRACT

The supervisory tasks that a novice principal emphasizes upon school entry make a major difference in developing the principal's professional identity as one who leads the improvement of instruction. Over the course of 2 years (1987-89), 12 first-time high school principals (7 male and 5 female, 10 white and 2 black) were studied. To ensure geographic and demographic representation, participants were selected from five different states. Each principal was interviewed bimonthly for 30 to 45 minutes, either in person or by telephone. The analysis of gathered data revealed that the top priorities of these first-time principals were communicating, team building, culture influencing, and goal setting. Priorities ranking in the middle range were direct assistance, curriculum development and directing, organizing and staffing, and student problem solving. The bottom-ranked priorities were managing conflict, budgeting, reporting, action research, and counselling. Further analysis of data revealed a deficit in preparation programs that was illustrated by the wide range in the principal's awareness, knowledge, and skill regarding their work as supervisors. (12 references) (KM)

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A STUDY OF SUPERVISORY PRIORITIES OF FIRST-TIME HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the supervisory priorities revealed in case studies of twelve first-time high school principals.

The analysis of data reveals that the top priorities of first-time principals were; communicating, team building, culture influencing, and goal setting. Priorities ranked in the middle range were; direct assistance, curriculum development and directing, organizing and staffing, and student problem solving. The bottom-ranked priorities were; managing conflict, budgeting, reporting, action research, and counseling.

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INTRODUCTION

> The aim of supervision is to bring faculty together as knowledgeable professionals working for the benefit of all students. The role of supervision is to change the attitude of many schools, that a classroom is an island unto itself, to an attitude that faculty is engaged in a common schoolwide instructional task that transcends any one classroom--a cause beyond oneself. (Glickman, 1985, p. 381)

The priority given to supervisory tasks and how they are carried out during entry into the principalship vary from one principal to another. Some seem to knowingly defer spending time directly or indirectly on these tasks, while other principals give them immediate and extensive high priority. It appears further that the kind of supervisory tasks principals emphasize upon entry makes a major difference in the principal's developing professional identity as one who leads the improvement of instruction (Blumberg, 1989)

First-time principals are confronted by a multitude of choices about the best way to spend their time in order to be effective in managing and leading their schools. Leading for instructional improvement is perhaps the most important area in which principals decide how and to what extent to be involved.

According to the literature, principals of effective schools spend time on those activities which foster accomplishment of instructional goals--hence the notion of leading for instructional improvement (Blumberg, 1989). This notion calls upon principals to perform supervisory tasks which will in turn influence school programs and ultimately benefit students. In attempts to understand more completely how principals prioritize supervisory tasks we must become clearer about what principals actually do when they supervise and what other factors are present as they make

priority-setting decisions and engage in related supervisory behaviors.

The Supervision-Administration Dichotomy

Dimensions of Supervision

Supervisory tasks have been defined and classified in various ways in attempts to clarify the work of principals in improving instruction. Sergiovanni (1987, p. 151) defines general supervision (as contrasted with clinical supervision) as those activities related to instructional improvement and teacher growth occurring within the broad context of schooling. He further states that general supervision is concerned with such issues as school organizational patterns and school climates that promote and facilitate teaching and learning, educational program development and articulation, and other issues of leadership as they are related to instructional improvement.

Glickman (1985, p. 257) outlines five tasks of supervision necessary for instruction to improve: direct assistance to teachers, inservice education, curriculum development, group development, and action research. These tasks are defined later in this paper.

Ben Harris (1985) defines supervision of instruction as what school personnel do with adults and things to maintain or change the school operation in ways that directly influence the teaching processes employed to promote pupil learning (p. 10). Of the ten supervisory tasks he outlines, Harris identifies five as being critical: developing curriculum; providing staff; providing materials; evaluating instruction; and arranging for inservice education (p. 10). He also identifies six processes of supervision as, assessing, prioritizing, designing, allocating resources, coordinating, and directing (p. 12).

According to Alfonso, Firth, and Neville (1981), the tasks associated with the supervisor's role include identifying instructional problems, serving as a resource person, promoting interpersonal communication, and serving as an agent of change within a complete organization.

Larsen (1987, p. 36) identified six instructional leadership functions most characteristic of principals of high achieving schools: goal setting; school community relations; supervision and evaluation; school climate; coordination; and staff development.

In their study of high school principals' perceptions of instructional leadership behaviors, Daresh and Liu (1985, pp. 15 and 16) identified staff development, resource acquisition and building maintenance, instructional facilitation, teacher supervision and evaluation, and student problem resolution, as instructional leadership behaviors (p. 15).

Dimensions of Administration

Some of what principals do by way of supervisory behaviors is classified as administrative in some places in literature. Regardless of this fact, what principals do that is broadly accepted as administrative is often related and critical to supervisory performance.

Sergiovanni (1987, p. 6) defines administration broadly as a process of working with and through others to accomplish school goals efficiently.

A study of the critical task areas of educational administration, completed in 1955, indicated instruction and curriculum development, pupil personnel, community-school leadership, staff personnel, school plant, school transportation, organization

and structure, and school finance and business management (in Kimbrough and Nunnery, page 4).

Gulick (1969, p. 13) outlined specific activities of administration which are widely accepted and which help illuminate the work of the principal. These activities; planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting, are brought to bear as the principal performs those other tasks called supervisory which are aimed at instructional improvement.

A Supervisory-Administrative Integration

Arguments can be made for including Gulick's tasks in the list of those considered to be more purely supervisory in nature. For example, in his study of the relationship between principal behavior and student achievement, Larsen (1984) found functions such as goal setting and coordination had an important influence on student achievement. Sergiovanni (1987, pp. 6 and 7) states that a similar distinction (administration-leadership) is useful to help clarify and sort various activities and behaviors of principals, but that for practical purposes, both emphases should be considered as necessary and important. Harris (1985) considers directing and coordinating as supervisory processes.

Whether we favor conceptualizations of principals' work toward instructional improvement in a fragmented (supervision and administration) or integrated (supervision and supervision-related) way, the data from this study reveal a complex picture which argues for an integrated conceptualization and further suggests groundwork for an integrated theory of supervisory practice. The multitude of task choices faced by the subjects included many tasks considered supervisory, but in

every case these were difficult to separate from tasks commonly understood as administrative. Therefore the supervisory tasks and definitions outlined for this study reflect an integration of supervisory tasks and those tasks which are widely considered administrative but which are related to performance of supervisory tasks.

Supervisory Tasks

The supervisory tasks and definitions outlined for this study are:

goal setting - identifying desired instruction-related outcomes (for example, Larsen, 1987, p. 4)

planning - working out in broad outline the things that need to be done and the methods for doing them to accomplish the purpose set for the enterprise (Gulick, 1969, p. 13).

organizing - the establishment of the formal structure of authority through which work subdivisions are arranged, defined, and coordinated for the defined objective (Gulick, 1969, p. 13)

staffing - the whole personnel function of bringing in and training the staff and maintaining favorable conditions of work (Gulick, 1969, p. 13)

directing - the continuous task of making decisions and embodying them in specific and general orders and instructions and serving as the leader of the enterprise (Gulick, 1969, p. 13)

coordinating - interrelating the various parts of the work toward achievement of a recognized purpose (Gulick, 1969, p. 13, Larsen, 1987, p. 5)

reporting - keeping those to whom the executive is responsible informed as to what is going on, which thus includes keeping himself and his subordinates informed through records, research, and inspection (Gulick, 1969, p. 13)

budgeting - fiscal planning, accounting, control, etc. (Gulick, 1969, p. 13)

communicating - engaging in exchange of ideas

managing conflict - facilitating resolution of particular disagreements that occur between two or more people at a particular time (for example, Glickman, 1985, p. 342)

culture influencing - initiating changes in or altering the belief systems, goal orientations, and ways of relating to colleagues and students in a school (for example, Blumberg, 1989, p. 4)

direct assistance - helping teachers assess and work on their own classroom needs for future improvement by observing, conferring, etc. [formative] (Glickman, 1985, p. 270)

formal evaluation - determining whether or not a teacher measures up to a standard of acceptable work [summative] (Glickman, 1985, p. 270)

curriculum development - the revision and modification of the content, plans, and materials of classroom instruction (Glickman, 1985, p. 8)

team building - behaviors aimed at having teachers work together to make decisions on mutual instruction-related concerns (for example, Glickman's group development, 1985, p. 9)

action research - the systematic study by a faculty of what is happening in the classroom and the school with the aim of improving learning (Glickman, 1985, p. 9)

student problem solving - behaviors aimed at resolving academic-related problems of students (Daresh and Liu, 1985, p. 8)

However clearly defined the tasks of supervision are it is impossible to conceive of their performance in a vacuum. Schools as organizations (Bidwell, 1965) including many variables must be taken into account in attempting to understand the principal's work as supervisor. Murphy and Hallinger et al. (1983) emphasized the importance of the interconnectedness of organizational variables in understanding the principal's role as instructional leader (pp. 137 - 149). They outlined a conceptual framework for instructional leadership, the three dimensions of which were functions, processes, and activities, and which integrated supervisory and administrative tasks (pp. 138 and 139). Evidence of such interconnectedness of variables will be reported after further analysis of the data from this study.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The purpose of this study was to document and describe the supervisory priorities of first-time high school principals.

PROCEDURES

The data analyzed in this study were gathered as part of the Beginning Principal Study (BPS) currently being conducted by a team of two researchers at the University of Colorado at Denver in collaboration with researchers at the University of Florida's Research and Development Center and at the University of Northern Colorado. The purpose of the two-year (1987-89) study is to document and describe the experiences, challenges, and keys to success common to the first-time high school principal. In addition, the BPS team will develop research-based systems of support for future first-time principals as well as a model training program for the high school principalship.

To provide insights into the developing professional identity of first-time high school principals and their supervisory priorities data were collected from 12 first-time high school principals, seven male and five female, two black and ten white, across 5 states. The principals in each school were selected on the basis of their status as first-time high school principals and their willingness to be part of the study. Within the constraints posed by the logistics of gathering data over great distances and at a variety of out-of-state locations, the study sites were selected to ensure geographic and demographic representation. Table 1 indicates the sex, race, geographic distribution, and type of school setting in which the subjects were assigned.

TABLE 1

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Sex	Race	Region	School Setting	Enrollment
Male	Black	Midwest	City	590
Female	White	Midwest	Suburban	2,910
Male	White	Midwest	Suburban	1,600
Male	White	East	Rural	1,332
Male	White	East	Suburban	1,400
Female	White	East	Suburban	2,500
Male	White	West	City	1,500
Female	Black	West	City	1,800
Female	White	West	Suburban	1,795
Female	White	Southeast	Suburban	1,583
Male	White	Southeast	Rural	550
Female	White	Southeast	Suburban	2,386

DATA COLLECTION

Bi-monthly interviews were conducted with the subjects either in person or by telephone over the course of an academic year. All interviews were conducted by members of the research team at the University of Colorado and the University of Florida. Five standard questions and related follow-up/probing questions were used each interview. The five items were:

1) What critical events are occurring?

2) How are you spending your time?

3) To whom did you turn for support and whom did you support?

4) What decisions have you made?

5) What joys, successes and frustrations are you experiencing?

Each interview took 30 to 45 minutes and was taped for later transcription.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data were content analyzed for each of the twelve cases according to supervisory task codes selected or derived from: Larsen's comparative study of principals in high-achieving and low-achieving schools (1987); Glickman's developmental supervision framework (1985); Daresh and Liu's study of high school principals' perceptions of their instructional leadership behavior (1985); Gulick's theory of organization (1969); and other sources. An independent validity check was performed to validate the codings. Priority ranking was based on frequency checks of each code for each of the twelve subjects.

RESULTS

Supervisory Tasks

Frequency checks of the data revealed that subjects spent their first year attending to an extensive array of supervisory tasks. These tasks and their rankings by subject are shown in Table 2:

TABLE 2

SUBJECTS' RANKING OF SUPERVISORY TASKS

communicating
team building
culture influencing
goal setting
***
direct assistance
curriculum development, directing
organizing, staffing
student problem solving
***
coordinating, formal evaluation
planning
budgeting, managing conflict
reporting
action research

Top-Ranked Tasks

Communicating, team building, culture influencing, and goal setting were the top-ranked tasks. Brief related comments appear below.

Communicating. The subjects indicated a consistently strong orientation toward communicating what behaviors they expected of staff, what their visions and goals as principals were, and how they expected the school to operate. These expectations were communicated through various means such as staff, committee, department chair and individual meetings, bulletins, and by principal behavior. Several subjects mentioned the importance of "modeling" the behavior they expected of staff.

Team Building. The subjects also indicated a consistently strong orientation toward team building as a means of getting faculty input on decisions related to program and instruction. There were frequent expressions of actual efforts to get staff groups to work with the subjects in making such decisions.

Culture Influencing. A major means of carrying out their work was revealed as the subjects sought to influence the ways in which their schools operated. Much of this influence took the form of the subjects radically changing or partially altering how faculty did their work. The subjects also made many attempts to have faculty rethink why they did their work in certain ways and how they related to each other as peers in getting things done.

Goal Setting. Many subjects were specific in stating school goals. Several referred to them as "my goals for the school" in contrast to "the school's goals" or "our goals."

Tasks Ranked in the Middle Range

Those tasks ranked in the middle range were:

direct assistance

curriculum development and directing

organizing and staffing

student problem solving

Since direct assistance and curriculum development are considered two of the more critical tasks of supervision, they are reviewed briefly below.

Direct Assistance. Many of the subjects indicated spending time observing teachers either using a clinical framework of observing and conferring or simply dropping in for quick "visitations." They consistently expressed concern or dissatisfaction with not spending enough time observing teaching. Only a few of the subjects made reference to helping teachers develop improvement plans as an outcome of observations.

Curriculum Development. Most references to curriculum development were statements of intention to somehow improve program offerings. Several subjects discussed meeting with formally designated improvement committees or departments for this purpose.

Bottom-Ranked Tasks

The bottom-ranked tasks were:

coordinating and formal evaluation planning

budgeting and managing conflict reporting

action research

Reporting and action research are mentioned below because of the importance of supervising the work of new principals regarding their school improvement efforts .

Reporting. The subjects made only occasional references to reporting to their superiors in any way. This is striking in light of their status as first-time high school principals.

Action Research. While curriculum development efforts seemed to be in place to some degree in each school, there was no evidence of systematic study of what was happening in the classrooms and schools (other than a reference to a North Central evaluation) as a basis for improvement.

Impact on Developing Professional Identity

What principals do helps shape their professional identity. In this regard the supervisory tasks revealed in the data play a role in shaping the subjects' professional identity. Although a couple of the subjects referred to themselves as "instructional leaders," it was not clear from the data whether or not the majority of the subjects perceived themselves as instructional leaders. This may be aside from any recognition that they are "supposed to be instructional leaders."

Summary

1. The supervisory tasks most frequently mentioned by first-time high school principals were, communicating, team building, goal setting, and culture influencing. These tasks focus on the human aspects of supervision as contrasted with those dealing with technical aspects.

2. Supervisory tasks least frequently mentioned were reporting and action research.

3. Two tasks considered to be of great importance in the literature, direct assistance to teachers, and curriculum development, were relegated to the middle range of supervisory priorities.

4. Patterns of priority setting varied widely among subjects within the array of supervisory tasks outlined above.

5. The subjects demonstrated a conscious awareness of the large array of tasks and forces which they must be aware of and contend with in doing their work.

6. The subjects' level of task consciousness appeared to be greater than any substantial action taken toward task performance. The majority tended to perform cautiously and even tentatively most supervisory tasks.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Preparation

Conclusions of the study and questions take into account the complex nature of schools as organizations (Bidwell, 1965, for example) as well as the importance of the principal as supervisor. The majority of the subjects seemed to have some level of awareness, knowledge, and skill regarding their work as supervisors. The wide range of awareness, knowledge and skill present in the data is striking, if not also disturbing. It raises questions regarding principal preparation, selection, and inservice development. It is noteworthy that such a wide range is typically attributed to deficits in preparation programs. While the study suggests improvement needs for preparation programs, it suggests also that considerable attention be paid to those experiences which lie between such programs and the first assignment as principal, as well as to selection and inservice education procedures.

Several recommendations are made for strengthening preparation:

1) The notion of preparation must be expanded to encompass those experiences which lie between university programs and the first two years on the job, as well as university programs themselves.

2) Considerable attention must be given to the ability to supervise within the context of the school as a complex organization. This suggests that those aspiring to the principalship should be "clinically supervised" during and beyond the internship.

3) First-time principals should be considered "still in preparation." This induction period should be characterized by continuous self-reflection, periodic review, analysis and modification of performance in the supervisory tasks areas.

Recommendations for Further Study

1. In what ways do prerequisites to supervisory tasks and environmental-situation elements relate to supervisory priorities?

2. What do principals do to control or otherwise influence the variables of prerequisites to supervisory tasks and environmental-situation elements? What are the related effects?

3. How do preparation programs and experiences beyond preparation programs help prepare future principals to work within the 3 major areas? How could preparation be improved?

4. How should the developing professional identity of principals be conceived and described?

5. What uncontrollable or previously undetectable factors (organizational arrangements, social structures, personal orientations, etc.) are present as first-time high school principals perceive and interact in supervisory situations?

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